Army Corps of Engineers

Press Conference

Tuesday, September 6, 2005

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OPERATOR: Welcome to today's conference. All lines will remain in a listen-only mode until the question-and-answer session, and at that time if you would like to ask a question, you may press star, one on your telephone touchpad. And at this time I would like to turn the call over to Dana Cruikshank. You may begin.

MR. CRUIKSHANK: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Once again, sorry for the delay. We just had a few communications issues, but we have them patched up. Thank you for your patience.

This is Dana Cruikshank, the public affairs office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers headquarters in Washington, D.C. Joining us on the call we have Al Naomi, Greg Breerwood (ph), and Walter Baumy of our New Orleans District, here to discuss the levee situation as well as dewatering efforts in New Orleans. I'm going to turn it over to them, and I'll let them introduce themselves.

MR. NAOMI: This is Al Naomi, senior project manager, New Orleans District.

MR. BAUMY: Hi, this is Walter Baumy, chief of engineering, New Orleans District.

MR. BREERWOOD: This is Greg Breerwood. I am the deputy district engineer for project management.

MR. BASHAM: This is Don Basham, chief engineering construction for the Corps of Engineers located in Washington, D.C. I'll try to kick this off. What I'd like to do is take the first few minutes and ask the team down range to give you a general overview and briefing of the status of progress over the last few days since we had this last news session, and then we'll open it--go directly into opening it up for questions and answers for you.

So, with that, Walter, I'd ask one of you all to take the lead and go ahead and give us an update since our last--I guess it was Friday we had this. So go ahead.

MR. BAUMY: This is Walter, B-a-u-m-y, and we've made quite a bit of progress over the last few days. We've been working very closely with all our local entities--Sewage and Water Board, the Levee Board, the State, and so forth--trying to come up with an approach that we can just

keep moving as quick as possible. So on the 17th Street Canal [inaudible] area of the Hammond Highway Bridge close to just where we want it. We left a 40-foot opening in the--that will allow water to flow out to the lake. Just this morning, we completed an access road that will give us access over to the London Avenue site, which is something we've desperately needed.

The pump stations are starting to get online on 17th Street Canal. Pump Station 10 is actually pumping at this point. Pump Station 6 was--we had some luck getting it started, but they're doing a little bit of repair work right now trying to clean up some debris out of the area. So that should be online, we're hoping, fairly soon. So we'll have a pump station there that can get water directly into the lake and out of the city.

Pump Station 1, which is a little bit further up in the system, should be able to pump to Pump Station 6, and that will drain the upper area, uptown areas. And over on the east side, Pump Station 19 has been running for some time, so we're evacuating water from two areas, from both sides at this point in time.

Over at London Avenue, we decided to put a closure at the Leon T. Simon (ph) Bridge similar to what we did at 17th Street Canal, and the contractor is mobilizing to the site at this time. He should start driving piles maybe tomorrow morning or tonight--sometime tonight.

At [inaudible] place, we'll start using some temporary pumps so we can start pumping down from the London Avenue Canal. Those pumps are located in the fabrication yard, and the contractor is evaluating what sort of piping fabrication he needs to do to accommodate the site.

Moving over to New Orleans East, we've got quite a number of pumps headed that direction at this point in time, temporary pumping, but also two of the three big pump stations on the Lake Pontchartrain side are currently operating. The third one needs a generator, and we're sending that to them. I don't have a time when it will arrive at this point in time.

We did a breach over on the GIWW in that New Orleans East area, and we've drained as much water as we can there. And we're also working on the pump station in that area, trying to get that moving.

Going down to St. Bernard, [inaudible] part of New Orleans in the St. Bernard areas, we've accomplished several breaches in that area, and we're now working on closing those breaches. And let me go back into New Orleans East. We're closing that breach as we speak too.

We've identified a need--or the locals have identified a need for fuel to run their pump stations, so we're going to send that down there through FEMA.

There are several breaches on the back levee, the local levee, that resulted either during the storm or were made by the local interests prior to us getting down there. So we'll repair those, too.

Plaquemines Parish, moving further south, one pump station is running that we know of. We're doing some more recon, trying to get a handle as to what else may be coming up, and as in St. Bernard, we're trying to get temporary pumps down to those locations. There were numerous breaches made in Plaquemines Parish, both sides of the river, many by local forces and some by contract forces. So we've got a handle on that. The breaches have been effective in getting the bulk of the water out to the level of the water on the outside--in other words, Gulf

level--and now we need to close those--close the breaches and get pump stations back in service or supplement them with temporary pumps to pump the remainder of the water out.

That's it for now, Don.

MR. BASHAM: Okay. Let's go ahead and open it up for questions.

MR. CRUIKSHANK: Moderator, we're ready to take questions.

OPERATOR: Thank you, sir. If you would like to ask a question, please press star, one.

Our first question comes from David Butler.

MR. BUTLER: Sir, could one of you describe in more detail the places of the breaches? And the ones that you described in New Orleans East and St. Bernard, are those purposeful breaches that you made, or are those accidental ones that were caused by the storm?

MR. BAUMY: New Orleans East, we made the bridge. In St. Bernard, we made some and some were caused by the storm.

MR. BUTLER: And can you describe how many there are? You said several, but can you be more specific?

Hello? I'm not able to hear your answer.

MR. BAUMY: Okay. I'm looking at a map. In the St. Bernard area, there were approximately four made by the storm along the--well, let me retract. It looks like at least six made along the--from the storm, but the outer levee had some breaches in it, too, and I need to get a better handle as to the damage that was occurred--that occurred out there. We're actually concentrating on the inferior levee at this point, to seal that off and stop any sort of waters from coming in at that perimeter.

MR. BUTLER: Okay, and by other levee, you mean the one that borders the lake, or--or--

MR. BAUMY: This doesn't border the lake. It borders the MRGO (?), and also the (?) Canal.

MR. BUTLER: Okay.

MR. : Would you mind just telling us what the MRGO is, for those who are unfamiliar?

MR. BREERWOOD: It's the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet. It's an alternate channel. It was built to get past some of the Mississippi River. It's more of a direct inlet to New Orleans. This is Greg Breerwood. Excuse me, I'm sorry. Direct inlet to the port of New Orleans, an

alternate route so that deep draft shipping could come in and provide, you know, that commercial shipping into New Orleans.

MR. : Excellent. Thank you.

MR. : Can you--the same way you've described the St. Bernard Parish, can you describe the number of storm--storm-caused breaches in Plaquemines Parish and New Orleans East?

MR. : Could you repeat the question?

MR. : Can you do the same thing for New Orleans East and Plaquemines County that you did for St. Bernard County, describing how many storm-caused breaches there are and how many--ones that you did on purpose?

MR. : Stand by [inaudible] hard time hearing you. He's looking for the storm-damage breaches in Plaquemines Parish, and which--

MR. : And New Orleans East.

MR. : --parish, other parish are you talking about, sir?

MR. : New Orleans East and Plaquemines Parish.

MR. : New Orleans East did not have any breaches induced by the storm.

MR. : Okay.

MR. : Plaquemines Parish, we're still evaluating that as far as storm versus induced by local interests or the Corps of Engineers.

MR. : Can you quantify in some degree, though, whether there's a couple or many or thousands?

MR. : There's probably about half a dozen down in Plaquemines Parish, and right now our focus is on closing those, not making breaches. We're focusing on getting those closed, and we have our [inaudible] unit out in the field doing that right now.

MR. BASHAM: This is Don Basham. Walter, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think part of the issue with what we would call the controlled breaches of not being able to identify whether they were part of the storm or we actually made them. The "we" could be the Corps of Engineers or the local levee and drainage district, and there are some areas that they--the drainage district got out early on that were able to get out in the area and make some of those controlled breaches to start getting the water out before

we were able to get mobilized and get there. And so in trying again, the communications challenge is still a challenge down there, and so I would--you know, that's part of the reason we're unable to tell you whether it was an actual controlled breach or a breach.

We do know that the levee district's out there working very hard to deal with this situation, too, and in many cases, it's onesies and twosies people that got out there and tried to work on some of these.

Is that fair, Walter?

MR. BAUMY: That's accurate.

MR. : Okay. Thank you.

MR. BASHAM: Next question.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Our next question is from Randolph Schmidt of the Associated Press.

MR. SCHMIDT: Yes, really two questions. Can you estimate yet how long it's going to take to drain the city and after that, how long to get things dried out?

MR. : Right now we're looking at afterwards anywhere from 24 to 80 days, and, you know, we're working every avenue to do everything that we can to get the parishes and the city back up in order. I feel

we're making a lot of progress at this point in time. We can start seeing things actually happening on the ground, which is what we've been after the entire time. So, you know, we're getting access to areas that we could not get to, and that's going to help us greatly.

MR. SCHMIDT: How about getting it dried out once--things dried out once the water's drained?

MR. : Well, when the water's drained, I mean, we're going to accomplish the mission of getting the water out of the city. As far as the reconstruction effort, I have no prediction at this time.

MR. : I think it would be hard to project at this point, you know, how long it would take once you got the water out for it to dry up. You know, that's predicated on this time of the year you still could have more rainstorm events come in, and weather.

Obviously, part of our plan here is while we talk about it in some venue about being 80 days, we are developing as we speak hopefully a way that, as the water recedes, we can kind of project that over time so we can start getting crews in there for life, health, and safety, and people in there to start looking at buildings and

integrity of buildings and start doing a better assessment of that. Right now, with most of them being underwater, we can't even get in there to have a chance to look at that and see the condition of the infrastructure as it will exist afterwards. Obviously, it had a lot of water that went into the buildings, and so you had pressure on outside of buildings. And now as the water recedes, that pressure will reverse the opposite direction and apply a load on the inside of buildings to the outside. It's not typically experienced by many buildings, and so part of the assessment will have to be to go in and look at the integrity of those buildings.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Our next question is from Neal Boyce (ph) of National Public Radio.

MS. BOYCE: Hi. Can you all hear me okay?

MR. : Yes, we can.

MS. BOYCE: Thanks for taking my question, and if I could ask you all to please identify yourself when speaking. Sometimes when different people talk, it's a little difficult to know.

I wondered if you could just give us--you gave us a nice detailed description of the different levees and

what's happening with each one, but could you give us a sort of overall view of the state of the water in New Orleans, how much of New Orleans is still significantly underwater. In places where water has been draining out, how much of the water is gone? I mean, you mentioned that in some places you're repairing intentional breaches because a lot of the water had receded and now you want to move in with pumps. I'm just looking for a sort of overall assessment of the state of things compared to, say, a week ago.

Thank you.

MR. BAUMY: I would--

MR. : Identify yourself.

MR. BAUMY: Okay. Excuse me. Walter Baumy. At this point in time, I would estimate in the range of 60 percent, maybe a little bit higher, a little bit lower.

MR. BASHAM: Walter, this is Don. Could you maybe expound on that just a little bit for the folks? And when we talked earlier, kind of talk about some of the different sub-bases where you'd had--where you'd gone in and made the controlled breaches where at least you've

seen--in the last 24 hours seen some reduction of a foot or two foot in water levels in some areas.

MR. BAUMY: In areas where the--it depends how much water--what the differential was between the inside [inaudible] versus the outside stages. In some areas, we may have had two feet of water higher inside the base, and so we immediately had a two-foot drop. In the lower areas, we may have had a four-foot differential, four to five feet in some cases, so those--that happens fairly quickly. You know, within 24 hours you get that quick drop. Then the real work comes in trying to pump down the rest.

The New Orleans area, the city itself, in general you follow the river, so as you get closer to the Jefferson Parish line, you're going to have more dry area, and the Metarie [inaudible] spilling over to Jefferson Parish. That area wraps into it on--closer to the river, so the areas dry [inaudible] near the river. Everything drains towards the lake. And we have seen some reduction in the pools, but I can't tell you how much at this point.

MS. BOYCE: Thanks very much.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Our next question comes from Matthew Wald of the New York Times.

MR. WALD: Thank you. If I could just go back and ask you to clarify, Mr. Baumy, on the last thing you said, that you estimated a range of 60 percent. That's 60 percent dry or 60 percent inundated? And then if you could, I'd like to ask--I'm told that the whole city has a pumping capacity of about 40,000 cubic feet per second. What capacity is running now?

MR. BAUMY: Various pump stations are starting up. It's not a large capacity at this point. It's very small, but it's at least progress.

MR. NAOMI: And this is Al Naomi. Keep in mind that of that 40,000, not all the 40,000 can effect reductions in the [inaudible] area, because some of the 40,000 is in areas that were not flooded, as on the west bank of the Mississippi River. So you have to be careful. As far as identifying which pump stations are part of that 40,000, I really couldn't tell you. That would be more of a question for the local sewage and water board.

MR. WALD: But, Al, what you're saying is some of the pumps are not in a position to be useful.

MR. NAOMI: They're on the other side of the river, and they get to other parts of the city, and so

they--they keep those parts of the city dry, but those parts of the city were not flooded, and so they can't be used for this effort that we're undertaking now.

MR. WALD: Okay. And I hear you saying also that you previously said you thought it would be 36 to 80 days, now you're saying 24 to 80 days. What is it that lowered the lower end of the estimate?

MR. NAOMI: New Orleans east bank, New Orleans East. We're just trying to work that. We're having a little bit of success in identifying the problems at the pump station, getting equipment in to supplement what needs to be done there. We're seeing some progress with generators en route to the pump stations. So those are the types of things that we're seeing at this point in time.

MR. BASHAM: This is Don Basham. I would say that that range of dates from 24 to 80 is across I guess what's based--I call the basic large five sub-basins. And so each one of those basins, depending on the amount of water that was in them and the amount of pump capacity we can get up and running, that makes the judgment of, you know, of the minimum from 24 to a maximum of 80. That's not the range necessarily that we got built into here of

uncertainty, you know, from beginning to end. That's each basin has its own ability to dewater and looking at that.

The other thing I would note is we're not totally relying on the existing pump system. I can't remember whether Walter made a comment about it or not, but we're also looking to bring in supplemental pumps and put them where we can strategically put them to help with the process. We're getting a tremendous outpouring of offer of volunteers for pumps and generators. It's just--it's just unreal, the people that's trying to offer them. So we're trying to look at that and see how we can get access and get them in there. In some cases, we got--we got the pumps, but physically finding the location to get those pumps to a place that we can get them in meaningful water at this point in time with the--with the transportation in the area is getting to be a tremendous point.

I would tell you that we're even getting volunteers from Germany and the Dutch to offer assistance from pumps and generators and other materials and equipment. So there's just been an outpouring of support for this. And I would tell you that the chief engineer intends to work both with the levee boards to get the pump

plants and facilities up and running as quick as we can. But we understand that there's probably a very good chance that some of these are not going to work right off. There's still some power problems and getting generators to them. And so we're looking to bring humanly possible every pump to bear that we can put in that area to get it drained out as quick as we can.

Next question.

OPERATOR: Our next question is from Heather Burk of Bloomberg News.

MS. BURK: Hi. Just one clarification. The 60 percent, that's the amount of New Orleans that is still underwater. Correct?

MR. : I didn't hear the question--

MR. BASHAM: Yes. I think the predictions here last week, the latter part of last week, is that 80 percent of the New Orleans area was underwater. And I think Walter was saying now maybe 60 percent of that is still--

MS. BURK: Okay. And my second--

MR. BASHAM: Is that right, Walter?

MR. BAUMY: Yes, that's my approximation. I have not calculated that by any means.

MS. BURK: My second question is: Right now the--yesterday the breach at the 17th Street Canal was fixed, but the two ruptures at the London Avenue Canal are still being worked on. Correct?

MR. BAUMY: That is true.

MR. BASHAM: But I would tell you--this is Don Basham. I would tell you that our immediate focus on the London Canal will not be focused on fixing those two breaches because of the extent of the breach that we have seen there after getting in and doing some initial checking. Walter mentioned that we initially built a rock dike up at the head--that's just nothing more than a little dam up at the head of the canal that was built to stop the water flow from coming in. But we've now decided since--to the extent that we saw the damage to the breaching in the two locations on that canal, to go back and build a sheet pile wall similar to what we built on 17th Street. And the intent of that will be as long as we can pump water out of that area, we will build that sheet pile wall in, start pumping water out of the channel back into Lake Pontchartrain. We will not pump--use that pump in that canal. We'll divert that water to another pump, the idea

being is we're going to try to pump that canal dry or down sufficiently to where we can get in there and get the area dried up to where we can get equipment in there and better work on that.

So you will not see an immediate focus on that. We've kind of turned our attention to the end of the canal to block that flow off because that's a more expedient way to do that and start evacuating the water.

MS. BURK: So you're going to put a sheet pile wall in there and pump the--pump the canal down into the lake, basically.

MR. BASHAM: Yes, ma'am.

MS. BURK: Okay. Thank you.

MR. BASHAM: Is that right, Walter?

MR. BAUMY: Yeah, this is Walter Baumy. I'd just like to add a little bit of clarification. We're still going to work on that pump station. We're not giving up on that effort, and we're not giving up on closing those breaches. But that's just not the priority at this point in time.

MS. BURK: The priority is to get the water--the priority is to get the water out of the canal, first of all--

MR. BAUMY: -- [inaudible] close that down [inaudible]--

MS. BURK: --into the lake, and then fix the breaches.

MR. BAUMY: -- [inaudible] water out of the city and into Lake Pontchartrain.

MS. BURK: Okay. Okay, thank you.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Our next question comes from Tom Ichniowski of Engineering News Record.

MR. ICHNIOWSKI: Hi. This is a question for Mr. Basham, I think. Our understanding is that a small group has been formed within the headquarters, under the head of your chief of planning, to try to figure out even a rough estimate of what the costs are in preparation for, you know, future supplemental spending bills. Is that right? I mean, do you have any kind of rough estimate at this point, or is it way too early? And can you confirm that you do have a small group trying to figure out the cost right now?

MR. BASHAM: It's too early to tell you what those numbers are because we're still trying to compile that. Yes, we do have a team looking at that, and we've been asked to look at that by the administration and Congress, looking at a potential supplemental bill to help supplement the work down there. But it's just too early for us, as you expect. And it's not just focused on the New Orleans-proper area; we're looking at the entire levee system up and down the Mississippi and along the coast and other areas, and dredging in the ports, and what have you. So it's a pretty encompassing look in the supplemental.

MR. ICHNIOWSKI: Thanks. I just have one more question for the New Orleans folks. What's the rough size of the Corps employee workforce down there, and roughly how many contractor workers do you have on the ground now? Just a ballpark.

MR. RICKIE: This is John Rickie [sp]. We're all looking at each other and trying to come up with a good honest number for you. We have probably, I believe, somewhere close to 100 folks that are back down at the district headquarters that have moved down there to join the small staff that remain behind. The contractor force

has got to be in the hundreds, also with the work crews that are joining the group down there from the other work we have ongoing in our normal mission. So, you know, you're talking probably upwards of over 500 people, I think, it would be honest to say.

MR. BASHAM: This is Don Basham. Let me help you with that because we just had a briefing on that this morning. And this number is the total fight down there, if you want to call it that, not just limited to the New Orleans area, but the devastation that's going on, that went on in Mississippi and Alabama, and starting to look at it as debris cleanup.

The Corps of Engineers has a little bit over 1,000 individuals involved in the effort right now. My guess is that number is probably really bigger than that, but that's probably a--that's a more accurate figure of what we can account for today that's out there. I have no idea--I could even begin to give you a good number of the number of people that represent contractors, but I can tell you we do have a number of contractors engaged. And I've got to tell you, the number of contractors that we have engaged both under contract and people that are

volunteering, again, time and material and equipment to help support this effort is just tremendous.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Our next question is from Peter Eisler of USA Today.

MR. EISLER: Hi, gentlemen. One sort of clarification point and one question. On the clarification, I think all of us were generally reporting, you know, immediately after the storm that there were three major breaches--the 17th Street, the London Avenue, and the industrial canal. It sounds like the right way to describe it might be three major breaches and a lot of smaller ones. I was wondering if you could tell us, maybe, the best way to describe sort of the total damage done by the storm. And also, maybe, if you could mention what the current status is of the industrial canal.

And then my question is, will all the water that's pumped out of the city end up in the lake? And is there any--does anyone have any idea how much water that is? And is there any concern about the water quality there and what the effect might be on the lake?

MR. BAUMY: I would describe the breaches as you've stated--three major ones with several smaller ones.

As the water recedes, we'll be able to get a better visualization of what actually--if there's others that are smaller that might require some attention. The IHN-3 situation, we do have a contractor onboard and I understand that he's out there on the ground working at this point in time.

MR. BASHAM: This is Don Basham. Let me expand on that, and then also I'll try to address the water quality issue.

We need to keep in mind here--and quite frankly, we don't have those numbers just yet, either, but ultimately, when this is all said and done, we'll have to put them together--if we had never had a levee breach, we still would have had a tremendous amount of water in these sub-basins, you know, the--again, you're talking about the level of capacity of the storm you had here compared to what the design was to. So trying to sort out what the contributeds you'd have from the storm within itself without a levee breach, plus what additional water you had as a result of the levee breach, we're still going to have to sort out.

With respect to the water quality, we've been working very closely with EPA and have gotten all the clearances to this point as what we know about what the water is in the city area-proper, and gotten clearances to pump that out. Of course, obviously, that will require us to working again with EPA to closely monitor that, take samples both inside and outside of what we're discharging.

MR. EISLER: And is all that water going into Lake Pontchartrain--none of it will go into the river?

MR. : That's correct.

MR. EISLER: Great. Thank you.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Our next question comes from Eric Berger of the Houston Chronicle.

MR. BERGER: Hi. I've got a couple of questions. First of all, you talked about that range of days from 24 to 80 and then mentioned that it's so wide because it varies for each of the five sub-basins. Perhaps you could give us an estimate of days for each of the five sub-basins to dry out the city.

MR. NAOMI: This is Al Naomi. It's going to be very hard to determine by sub-basin. I'd say that right now we're very early on in this process and, as we get pump

stations online, I think the estimate will be more refined. But you see in an estimate that says 20, 40, 80 days that in the case there's a certain degree of uncertainty there. It all depends on how many pump stations get onboard and how efficient they are, what kind of debris gets trapped in the pumps, do they go down, do they have to put them back up. There's a lot of variability in that. And to give estimates much beyond that at this point, I think, would be leading you down the wrong path, and I'd rather not have to do that.

MR. BERGER: I appreciate that. Perhaps you could maybe talk a little bit about what the last area of the city to be dried out is likely to be.

MR. NAOMI: It's very hard to say right now. I think certainly we're working on all of the areas. It's all going to depend on how many of the pump stations in the various areas can pump efficiently and effectively. I think certainly the goal is to get them all out quickly, as quickly as possible. I think as the week progresses we'll have a better feel for that. Right now, we just started pumping on the 17th Street Canal, and as that pump station, those pump stations get onboard, more pumps come online,

we'll have a better feel for that. But really, it's too early to tell that, to even estimate a guesstimate right now.

MR. BERGER: Okay.

MR. BASHAM: This is Don Basham. Let me expand on that a little bit, if you don't mind. We're not--it may appear, but we're not trying to be evasive. We just do not want to put out information that people can start looking at and give them hope that they can get back into their home or their place of business here until we really can get a firm hold on the conditions there. We're just now starting to get the water out and get the breaches under control, today starting to get some really good communications with the Levee Board and the folks in the area so we can really get a good handle on the existing pump capacity, so we also can see what else--supplemental pump capacity.

But I will assure you that within the next couple of days we're working very hard right now to develop some modeling. We've done [inaudible] survey to be able to develop some models that can give us some pretty good projections of when we think that we can evacuate the water

in the very sub-basins and we'll be sharing that with you in the very near future. That's critical--we know that you want to know that, but also, more importantly right now for us in the fight is we want to be able to provide a tool for FEMA and the other agencies to know when water's going to be off a certain area so that they can get in and start search and rescue missions and looking for remains of individuals and start the reconstitution effort.

MR. BERGER: Then the second question I wanted to ask was about the 17th Street Canal levee. I'm a little unclear. Did you say that the sheet piling, you left about 40 feet open so that you could pump water out into the lake? And then secondly, has the levee breach been fixed, or are you going to wait to do that?

MR. : Okay, I'll answer that. The 17th Street Canal needs to remain opened in the center as long as the pump stations are capable of pumping, because that is the avenue for water to exit the city into the lake.

The second part of the question regarding the levee breach, they're still working on it at this time. What we've done is we've stabilized it to the point that we can get out there and then we can do some more remedial

measures on it to stabilize that section the way we feel it needs to be prior to getting all the water down in the neighborhoods in that area. So there's still work to be done, but we're at the right stage at this point in time. We've got it where we expected it to be and we know what we need to do just to go ahead and finish it off.

MR. : And we need to understand when we talk about "have it fixed," it's only fixed in a temporary measure to control the flow of water right now. Obviously, when we get this behind us and we can get the water levels back down, we'll have to go about going in and effecting a more permanent fix.

MR. BERGER: Thank you very much.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Our next question is from Beth Healy of the Boston Globe.

MS. HEALY: Hi. Can you describe at all the path and duration the contaminated water from New Orleans will take from Lake Pontchartrain until it flushes out eventually into the Gulf? I mean, will it take months, will it--and just the path it will take.

MR. : Can you repeat that question, please?

MS. HEALY: I'm trying to understand the path and the duration that the contaminated water will take before it flushes out into the Gulf. Will it take several months once it's in Lake Pontchartrain to get to the Gulf, or will it be quicker?

MR. NAOMI: This is Al Naomi. There's a lot of variables in that. It depends on how much rainfall occurs in the area, what the winds are, do we get north winds from cold fronts--a lot of things affect that. The water does circulate out of the basin eventually, but it depends a lot on meteorological conditions, which we really don't have much control or much knowledge of, at least not here. Maybe some folks who are better attuned to that basin, as far as the hydraulics of it, could answer that question. We just don't have that answer right now.

MS. HEALY: All right. Thanks.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Our next question is from Pete Carey of Knight Ridder.

MR. CAREY: My question goes back--and you've described this before, but I just want to hear it again. Can you tell me, when you first learned of the breach on Monday, how you learned about it, and then what you did

with that information? That would be the 17th Street levee. Still trying to get this. Okay?

MR. BAUMY: This is Walter Baumy. It was obvious that there was a breach there. I mean, the news media, levee district, contact with the Emergency Operations Center in Baton Rouge, and various means of getting that communication to us, it was very obvious there was a breach. And we knew it was a long way away from the road. And we were even--before we had any sort of plans together, all folks were working on this, the local levee district, the state department of transportation, the Corps of Engineers, everybody was working to get equipment out to the site, finding any material that they can make to get back to the breach area. And we've also had contract forces. So it was sort of a group effort. But the state initially got out there and they just started building that road back there and then we came in with our contractors to supplement that effort -- give them some heavy-duty capability to speed the process up of getting back to the breach and closing it.

The obstacles that we face involve just getting material to the site. And so all avenues were working to

locate material and equipment that we could get there, realizing that the city was inundated. You know, as soon as we learned of it, all forces were working, moving towards a fix.

MR. CAREY: And you learned of it Monday morning, is that right, from a--

MR. BAUMY: I don't recall the exact time. It was right after the storm.

MR. CAREY: Okay. So, what day?

MR. BAUMY: Whew. I don't even know what today is.

MR. CAREY: Okay. But Monday?

MR. BAUMY: Yeah, Monday morning--I believe Monday morning, the 29th, is when the storm came ashore.

MR. : Peter?

MR. CAREY: Yeah.

MR. : Actually, we learned about it--this is Greg Breerwood--I think it was the middle of the night when we got the first call that it was a, you know, a breach or a suspected breach because water was coming in after the storm. That's when we heard it.

MR. : Middle of the night on Monday?

MR. BREERWOOD: It was actually, actually into Tuesday. I think it was very early Tuesday morning, 2 or 3 o'clock.

MR. : Okay, great. Thank you.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Our next question is from Arthur Hirsch of the Baltimore Sun.

MR. HIRSCH: Yes, thank you. I just have one quick follow up to a question that was raised earlier. Do I understand it correctly that there is no way to say the rate at which water is being pumped back into the lake? Is that right?

MR. : Could you repeat it? Again, I'm having difficulty hearing your questions with the speaker phone.

MR. HIRSCH: Sure. Mr. Walt(?) asked earlier about the rate at which water was being pumped back into the lake. My understanding is that there's really no way to say at this point with any accuracy at what rate water is being pumped back into Lake Pontchartrain; is that right?

MR. : Yes. We know that several pump stations are operating at a decent capacity, maybe somewhat

less than their official capacity, but the ones on 17th Street Canal, they have started them up, and we've had a little bit of difficulty with some of the mechanical equipment, and pretty much expected that. So they have got two of them--they've got one going for sure, the one on I-10 that's definitely going at this time, but we're not exactly sure of the volume that they're pumping at this point in time.

We have folks in the field trying to work that with them, with the Sewage and Water Board, and seeing when they're going to be online.

Our communications are still not very well with the folks on the field. In some instances they're out at the site and they have to go to another location to call us.

MR. HIRSCH: And the other question is, could you give us any sense of the amount of material that it took to close the 17th Street levy to the extent that you have? I mean how much material was dumped into that spot, and over how many days did that operation of the dumping of those bags with gravel or sand or whatever the material was, over how many days did that take place?

MR. : I'd say five to six days we've been dumping material in the site, but a lot of that was building access back to the breach area. And, no, I don't have that quantity with me.

MR. HIRSCH: All right, thank you.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Our next question is from Ann Carnes [ph] of the Wall Street Journal.

MS. CARNES: Hi. Thanks for taking questions. I have two if I could. First I'd like to follow up on the earlier explanation of the finding that there are breaches on the levies in St. Bernard Parish. My understanding of that is that the inner levies are the levies closer to the developed areas and the outer levies would be the ones closer to the undeveloped marsh area going toward Lake Bourne, is that correct?

MR. BAUMY: Yes. This is Walter Baumy responding. That is correct. The--between the river and the local levies are all of the residential area. Then behind that is a ponding area, and the perimeter levy is closer to the MRGO GIWW loop.

MS. CARNES: And my second question is, do you have any sense, based on what you've seen so far and what

you know, of how high the storm surge was that came in from the lakes, Lake Bourne and Lake Pontchartrain at this point?

MR. : My best estimate at this point is I'm getting reports of up to 20 feet. And I haven't substantiated that with high water marks, which we will do, but predictions are in the 20 foot range.

MS. CARNES: For both lakes or is that just Lake Bourne?

MR. : Pardon?

MR. : She said for both lakes?

MR. : This is along the St. Bernard--yeah, it's generally the whole area.

MS. CARNES: And how--if I could just follow up, I'm sorry. I mean how high are the levies in St. Bernard Parish?

MR. : The levies vary. It depends on its location in the system.

MS. CARNES: Could you give a range?

MR. : Around 17, 17-1/2 feet on the federal levy. The interior levy I'm not certain of that height, but it's much lower than the federal levy.

MS. CARNES: And just again, you're not making a distinction between flooding that would have come in sort of from the east as opposed to from the lake to the north. You're saying that overall the surge was about 20 feet estimated at this point?

MR. : Don, can you--we're having a hard time hearing that last part of that question. Can you give us that?

MR. BASHAM: Yeah. I think the question she's asking is on the surge that you're saying is 20 feet. That's just an average over the whole area there, versus as it would be on Lake Pontchartrain versus over the lake on the east side?

MR. NAOMI: Yeah. This is Al Naomi. Generally speaking, the St. Bernard and east New Orleans areas are going to experience a higher surge than the Lake Pontchartrain because they're more adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico. So we anticipate that the surge levels would be higher in those locations.

MS. CARNES: Again, just to try and nail this down, so you're saying a surge from St. Bernard is estimated--I mean in the St. Bernard Parish area from the

east would be about 20 feet, but it might have been lower sort of coming from the lake to the north?

MR. NAOMI: That's probably correct, but we don't have the actual readings as yet. We're going to have to analyze all of that, but that's what normally we would experience on storm surges, that you'd have a higher surge elevation in the St. Bernard-east New Orleans area, and a somewhat lower elevation on the lake front, depending on the path of the storm, how fast it goes and the wind velocities.

MS. CARNES: Okay. Thank you very much.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Our next question comes from Thomas Ferraro of NBC News.

MR. FERRARO: Hi. I just wanted to have a little clarification, and it sounds like you're really not sure about the pump stations and how many are actually operating.

MR. BAUMY: This is Walter Baumy. We are sure about certain pump stations that are operating. I know four are operating at this time.

MR. FERRARO: So at least four, but not all at full capacity?

MR. BAUMY: That is correct.

MR. BASHAM: I think--this is Don Basham--I think we know which pump plants are operating. We're just not sure of what the capacity that they're operating just yet. And some of them, as he mentioned, I think the 17th Street one, we got part of it operational, and then one of the pumps started heating up, and we had to do some checking on it. So as we start these up, some of them are kind of at a start and stop and check mode for a short period of time.

MR. FERRARO: And how many pump stations are there in New Orleans proper and how many--you need to get up--you mentioned that some of them aren't under water so you don't need to get them up, but--

MR. : There's numerous pump stations. I can't give you that exact answer at this point, but what you've got is you've got a system where the Sewage and Water Board will pump certain areas to different lift stations and then lift the water around the city to [inaudible] that outer perimeter. So we know that many of the lift stations on the interior are working, could be operating at this point in time, but we need to get those

perimeter stations back in service so that we could feed the water to them.

MR. FERRARO: I see, thank you.

MR. : And I'd just like to clarify too, when I gave you that number I was speaking predominantly about Orleans Parish. St. Bernard Parish has several pump stations in operation, and I know of four, but again, I don't that capacity, and Plaquemines Parish has one operating.

MR. FERRARO: Great, thanks.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Our next question is from Dave Shartak [ph] of Construction Equipment Guide.

MR. SHARTAK: Thank you. Basically are there any cost estimates yet for the repairs, the reconstruction, and the rescue efforts?

MR. : No, there is not. That's something to--you know, still to be put together. The comment a while ago was, you know, we're just now even putting together supplemental, the steel pipe to clean up in recovery efforts, so we have not got into looking at figures to rebuild the levies and rebuild the cities and

the communities and towns throughout Mississippi and Alabama.

MR. SHARTAK: Thank you.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Our next question is from Nell Boyce of NPR.

MS. BOYCE: Yes, thank you. Along the lines of asking about how many pump stations are working, I mean for those of us who aren't so familiar with New Orleans' pumping system, could you just give us a general overview of approximately how many pumps there are in the areas that would be useful in terms of getting water out, and approximately what of the total capacity is now operational? I mean we've heard there's at least four, and you've mentioned a couple other stations in the other parts of the city that may be working. But I'm trying to get a sort of more big-picture sense of how much more pumping will be able to be put online versus what we have now.

MR. BAUMY: Walter Baumy. There's approximately 20 within the affected area in Orleans Parish. St. Bernard Parish approximately 8, and I'm not--Plaquemines Parish, we're still trying to get our reconnaissance folks out

there to look at that, and we're analyzing the data that we have. And we're estimating maybe 7 to 8 in Plaquemines.

MS. BOYCE: That sounds like approximately about 40 stations?

MR. BAUMY: That's approximate.

MS. BOYCE: So about 40 stations. And of those 40 stations approximately how many are operating at some capacity now?

MR. BAUMY: I would say maybe 10, as a rough estimate.

MS. BOYCE: Okay. And do you have any sense of how many additional sort of mobile or temporary stations you all are thinking of bringing in?

MR. BAUMY: We're looking at every avenue on temporary stations. Probably about 4 to 5 spots at this point in time that are actually there, but we're going to look at bringing in many more. That's already in the works.

MS. BOYCE: Okay. Thank you. That's extremely helpful. And one follow-up question. You mentioned the previous estimates were that about 80 percent of the city was flooded in some way. Now you're saying that looks like

it's maybe down to about 60 percent of the city. But is there a qualitative sense of how the level of water has changed? In other words, you know, have we gone from--are all areas sort of slowly receding? Are there some areas that have receded quite a bit? Or when you say, you know, still 60 percent, does that mean, you know, 60 percent is still essentially inaccessible by foot because it's covered by water?

MR. : The estimates are crude at this point at best. You know we feel--we know the water is receding. The areas that we breached--I explained this earlier--you know, we saw immediate relief in the areas where we breached. So you know, some area could have had a 4 to 5 foot drop over the last 2 days, and I'm speaking mostly St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parish for that. And New Orleans east, with them pumping out their one station and now there's a second station on line, so we expect to see that drop a quicker pace than we have seen.

MR. BASHAM: If you define that--this is Don Basham. If you define that in one way, where we made breaches, intentional breaches, you probably saw a more dramatic and appreciable lowering of the water. Where

we've not been able to make any breaches and having to rely so far on pumping, you've probably seen less a dramatic change in that, if that helps at all.

MS. BOYCE: No, that's very helpful. And just one last question. In the areas where intentional beaches were made, so you know, you could have seen a sort of dramatic lowering of 4 feet or more in just a couple days, how high were the water levels there before the intentional breaches were made?

MR. : I don't have the predicted elevations, but we know the water was up by the rooftops, so that tells me at least 8 to 12 feet.

And just to clarify, we've breached everywhere where it made sense to breach. We did [inaudible] with the contractor, and if the water levels would be greatly reduced by a breach, then we breached. If the water levels were close to equal or higher on the outside than the inside, then obviously you would not breach.

MS. BOYCE: Right. And from what you said before it sounded like now you're going in and trying to repair those breaches so that you can pump out what's left of the water.

MR. : That's correct. That is in motion actually. They're out in the field doing that as we speak.

MR. BASHAM: This is Don Basham. We don't have to have those repaired before we can pump out water. The urgency for repairing those is for the next rain event, event that would have the exterior water level at whatever you're talking about being around, could have a rise and actually bring water back in, so it's critical that once we evacuate the water we can from the breach, is to get that breach closed up because that community is exposed to the exterior elements if we don't get it closed back up. So that's the urgency for closing up, not necessarily the urgency for having it closed up before you can start pumping.

MS. BOYCE: Right. Thank you very much.

OPERATOR: Thank you.

MR. : This is headquarters. This will be our last question.

OPERATOR: All right. Our last question is from Melanie Everslie [ph] of USA Today.

MS. EVERSLIE: Hi. I just wanted to make sure I was clear on the situation with the pumps. There are about 40 pumping stations throughout the area, is that right, and about 10 are operating right now?

MR. : That's an approximate number.

MS. EVERSLIE: All right. And you mentioned that there are four that you know of at the very least that are operational. Can you--you may have mentioned this before and if you did I apologize. I came in late. But can you tell me which four stations are up and running?

MR. : We lost the last part of that question.

MR. BASHAM: She wanted to know which four pump stations were up and running.

MR. : Okay. And again, I'm just going to focus on Orleans Parish. The I-10 pump station along 17th Street Canal; Station 19 at I-10C, where it just [inaudible] it into the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal; and in New Orleans East, the St. Charles pump station and the Jackie [ph] pump station are running.

MS. EVERSLIE: Okay. I just want to read that back. The 17th Street Canal Station. I think you said 19 at I-10?

MR. : Let me correct that right now. There's a pump station along the I-10 that discharges into the 17th Street Canal, different than Pump Station No. 6, which is at the head of the canal. Pump Station 6 was started up. It experienced some mechanical difficulties, and [inaudible] and clogging and so forth, so that's being worked at this point in time.

MS. EVERSLIE: Okay, so that--

MR. : [Inaudible] -- that one is working when I mentioned the four.

MS. EVERSLIE: So Pump Station 6 is one of the four that are working?

MR. : No, that's not correct. The I-10 pump station; Pump Station 19; St. Charles Pump Station and Jackie Pump Station.

MS. EVERSLIE: Okay, I've got that. Thank you very much.

MR. : You're welcome.

MR. : Ladies and gentlemen, this concludes today's news session. We really do appreciate you all joining us and trying to help get the word out. I would ask you to help us get the word out that FEMA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the other federal communities are doing everything we can to the immediate need, and the discussion today is get the water out of the city of New Orleans and try to get back some semblance there.

I know there's some frustration--I can tell in your questions--of trying to get a better handle on the estimate of when we're going to get water out of there, and I promise you we will share that information with you just as soon as we can get a little bit more resolution and level of detail ourselves and can rely on that, because we know a lot of people are just waiting to know that, when they can get back into the communities and families and homes and businesses, and we just don't want to mislead folks, and so we're working on that very hard. It's not a matter of interest. It's a matter of getting the right information and determining what facilities are up and

running and what their capabilities are to evacuate the water.

So thank you all very much.

MR. : Also I would like to add that we'll be having this conference again tomorrow at the same time, 2:00 p.m. Eastern time, and the number will be the same. So you can use the same call-in information. Also we are going to attempt, just attempt, to get the transcript of this call up this afternoon, probably, hopefully within the next 3 hours. If not, they'll be up by tomorrow morning on the USACE website, which is www.usace.army.mil.

Thank you very much. Have a good day.

OPERATOR: This concludes today's conference. We thank you for your participation.

[End of conference.]